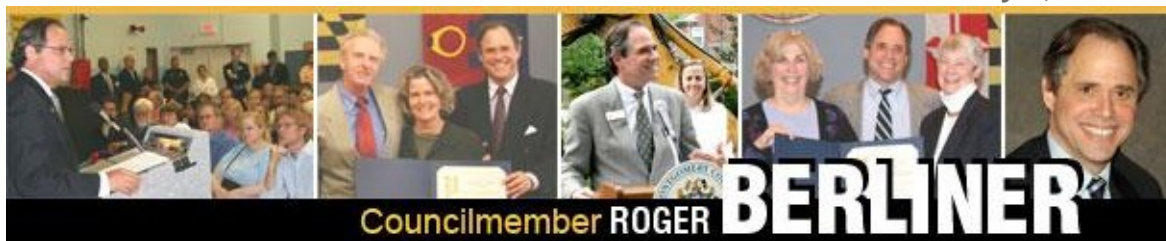


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February 4, 2010



The Berliner Brief

Dear District 1 Residents and Friends,

On the eve of another forecasted huge snowstorm, I hope you will take the appropriate steps to be safe and sound. I can assure you that our County has been preparing for it as soon as it appeared on radar. Perhaps the storm will give you more time to be with your family, go sledding, to read a good book, watch the Super Bowl (go Saints!), and perhaps to even read this modest newsletter. It may not provide you with the warmth you need, but it hopefully will shed some light on the issues that I have been working on here at the Council on your behalf.

Sincerely,

Roger Berliner
District 1

Balancing our Budget: Not With Ride On Cuts

In response to the national/global recession, our County's projected revenues for the current fiscal year have taken a big hit, not unlike local governments across the country. We need to reduce spending in the middle of this fiscal year by approximately \$100 million. Not an easy task. We have already cut \$30 million, and now we need to cut an additional \$70 million.

The County Executive has sent to the Council his proposed \$70 million Savings Plan. After the Council's committees review his plan, we will act on February 9th. I believe that our Council will adopt 95% or more of the Executive's proposed cuts. In tough times, there are only tough choices, and the County Executive has done a commendable job.



There will be, of course, some disagreements. One of them, at least for me, relates to the Executive's proposal to reduce Ride-On bus services. Fortunately, after the public hearing attended by approximately 300 people on February 1st, your District 16 and 18 Delegation, myself, and others such as Action Committee for Transit all weighed in against these cuts, the County Executive revised his plan and will now retain critical bus routes such as Routes 30 and 36. This was the right thing to do, and I commend the County Executive for responding to the public outcry.

However, the revised proposal still eliminates weekend services that are important to District 1 residents, such as

the 29 and T-2 services. The people using the bus on these routes and other weekend routes proposed for elimination do not have other options for getting to work, or where they need to go. Bottom line: I am opposed to reducing Ride On bus service. I believe bus service is a core government function, particularly for those people that have no alternative, which is true of the overwhelming majority of people using the bus. More broadly, transit is essential to our quality of life which is most threatened by unacceptable congestion on our roads. If we are ever to get people out of their cars in larger numbers, and gain the environmental and other benefits associated with fewer vehicle miles traveled, it will be because we have a first class transit system.

Eliminating Ride-On service is flatly inconsistent with those goals.

We may need to raise fares, and consider some mid-day reductions and other measures that could produce needed cost-savings. Some of that we can do immediately, some may need to wait until we act on next year's budget, which will be even more challenging.

I will be voting to restore Ride On services, and looking hard to find other budget "offsets." I was in the minority in the Transportation, Infrastructure, Energy & Environment Committee on this issue, and I think it is going to be an uphill fight in the full Council. But I feel strongly that we should not go backwards on this critical, core service, and I am going to fight to retain them.

A Robust Capital Budget

While we are going to be very challenged on the operating budget, low construction costs, favorable interest rates on bond financing, and the opportunity to employ the construction trades makes this a particularly ideal time to finance construction of schools that have been overcrowded for far too long, for recreation centers in communities that have been neglected for far too long, and other critically important county projects.

Accordingly, I am very pleased that such a strong Capital Improvements Program has been submitted to the Council for the next six year cycle and commend the County Executive for his leadership in this area. Over the next several months, my colleagues and I will review the recommended FY 2011-2016 CIP but final Council action will not take place until May. In the meantime, please let your voices be heard by sending an [email](#) to my office or attending one of three public hearings scheduled for February 9th, 10th or 11th at 7:00 p.m. at the Council Office Building in Rockville.

Good News for District 1 Schools

In my [last newsletter](#), I shared a list of the construction projects by cluster that were included in MCPS's Recommended FY 2011-2016 CIP. On January 15th, the County Executive unveiled his six year capital budget and recommended funding for more than 99% of the Board of Education's request. This is wonderful news for many of the schools in District 1, as it includes recommendations for classroom and gym additions, bathroom renovations and school modernizations. Many of our schools, especially at the elementary school level are severely overcrowded and in dire need of modernization.

Please see the [schedule of projects recommended for District 1](#).

Scotland Community Center Renovation

Early in my tenure on the Council, I, along with the County Executive and many of my colleagues on the Council, made a promise to the residents of the Scotland Community to support and fund the renovation of the Scotland Community Center in Potomac. It was a promise to renovate the center so that the children and residents of this historic, underserved, African-American community may enjoy access to safe, healthy, and productive activities and programs. I gave my word to support this project and that is what I did when I fought for its inclusion in the FY 2009 - 2014 Capital Improvements Program. At that time only planning and design money was programmed, but I am thrilled to see that the renovation project is now fully programmed and recommended for funding in the FY 2011-2016 Capital Improvements program which is before the Council for consideration right now. If approved, the Scotland Community will be able to enjoy a new, improved community center in 2012.

Please see [the entire recommended CIP](#) for more information.

Preserving Our Farmers Markets

I wanted to give you an update on ZTA 9-11, legislation to preserve farmers markets that contribute so much to our quality of life. This legislation was written because under current zoning laws, it is illegal to operate a farmers market in a residential zone. One of our farmers markets, Twin Springs, was asked to cease operations at the St. Andrews Church in Bethesda. Recognizing the importance of this neighborhood market and their quality, fresh produce, I took action. Much thought was given to this legislation resulting in a piece that allows farmers markets to operate in residential zones while considering the character of our neighborhoods.

This zoning text amendment was introduced on November 17th, 2009, a public hearing was held on January 12th, and on January 21st the legislation went to committee for discussion. Montgomery County Councilmembers, the Planning Board and staff were all extremely supportive of farmers markets and everyone agreed that this was important legislation for Montgomery County. While modest modifications are contemplated, I remain confident that at the end of the day, we will be successful in keeping our farmers markets an important part of our life in District 1 and throughout the County.

Snow Removal Procedures

As pretty as a snowfall can be, I, for one, have had enough! And so has our County's budget. It is a big deal, an expensive deal, to get our roads back in shape after a huge snowfall. When it isn't just a huge snowfall, but a blizzard of almost epic proportions, that makes it even tougher. And as I write this, we are bracing for what the forecasters say is going to be another monster storm. I hope you will be safe and snug in your homes if this comes to pass.

After the last blizzard, I asked for a briefing on our County's snow removal operation after hearing from so many of you that you were disappointed (in some cases that is a polite understatement) in the service you received. I shared with our Director of the Department of Transportation each of your e-mails so that the Department knows each and every street that felt abandoned the last time. And I pressed on why it took so long to get into our neighborhoods and why our County's on-line "maps" showed streets as plowed that were not.

Here is what I was told:

- The Department's first objective is to achieve "bare pavement" on our primary and secondary roads. These are the roads necessary for emergency vehicles. In the case of the blizzard, given the amount of snowfall combined with high winds, that meant they had to plow those streets five times to achieve that result. And that meant it took days before they could begin moving into our residential neighborhoods in a serious way. While I still have questions as to whether it is absolutely essential to have bare pavement (as opposed to passable) on these roads before turning to our neighborhoods, I understand and respect their judgments in these matters.
- The map on the County web site was inaccurate. It appears that part of the problem was in the definition of "your streets have been plowed". If a plow had done an initial swipe of the street, it appeared on the map as "done" even though the crews understood that it would take more than one pass to make our streets workable. This problem was exacerbated by the slow timing in getting to the neighborhoods and the condition of the streets when they were finally addressed. Cars had attempted to traverse the neighborhood streets thus compacting the snow and making it harder to clear.
- For our neighborhoods in District 1, there were additional problems as a result of our crews using the GIS mapping of the County. Some of these maps apparently do not accurately reflect current street configurations, particularly in areas immediately adjacent to our small municipal governments. DOT officials assured me that they would make every effort to update their maps so that none of our residents are left unattended.

I can tell you that failures in service were not the result of people goofing off. Folks worked around the clock for days. We can always do better, and I know that the Department is committed to that goal as well. To that end, I communicated directly with the Director of DOT to make sure that as they prepare for this next huge storm, that those of you who felt let down before are on their radar this time around. So, let's cross our fingers that this storm isn't as big and bad as the latest projections, and, if it is, that our people are able to get to you and your neighborhoods as soon as possible.

BRAC Update: "Team Maryland" Delivers!

In December, "Team Maryland" -- our wonderful Maryland Congressional Delegation led by Congressman Chris Van Hollen and Senators Barbara Mikulski and Ben Cardin -- announced the passage of the Fiscal Year 2010 Defense Appropriations Bill which includes \$300 million for BRAC-related transportation mitigation efforts at the new Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Bethesda, MD and the Fort Belvoir Community Hospital in Virginia. It is anticipated that at least half of these monies will be spent in Montgomery County.

This unprecedented infusion of monies for multi-modal transportation improvements will go a long way toward funding the improvements necessary to at least partially mitigate the effects of the huge influx of patients and visitors to the new facility. Previously, the federal government had not done its fair share to offset the traffic nightmare that looms on a stretch of state road that is among the worst congestion in the region.

Details of the specific actions are still being finalized but a working framework for the improvements has been developed by our DOT in conjunction with the Maryland State Highway Administration. Four major intersections surrounding the affected areas are slated for "improvements." This is a good thing. But it is also universally recognized that these improvements are more of a very short-term fix than a long-term solution.

That is why I have been pushing hard for Rts. 355 and 191 to be designated "[Sustainable Transportation Corridors](#)." As such, these state roads could potentially become models for reducing vehicle miles traveled by getting people out of their cars and into state-of-the-art modes of transit. It is also a unique opportunity to integrate and link-up with what we are contemplating just miles up the Pike in the White Flint sector plan, a plan that depends greatly on maximizing transit options.

I was pleased that my colleague, Councilmember Elrich, joined with me in a letter to the Governor urging that some portion of the \$150 million be spent in advancing this long-term vision -- not at the expense of our intersection improvements, but in addition to it. Neighborhood leaders and the Coalition of Military Medical Center Neighbors have written to me indicating their strong support for our Sustainable Transportation Corridors concept as a part of a larger Montgomery County transportation initiative. I am confident that together we can advance both our short-term and long-term objectives. In the weeks ahead, I will be working with the County Executive, the Governor and our Congressional Delegation to make sure that we maximize the benefits of the \$150 million secured by Team Maryland.

White Flint Update



The White Flint Sector Plan is currently being reviewed by the Council's Planning, Housing, and Economic Development (PHED) Committee. I am not a member of that Committee. However, given the plan's importance to so many of you and to our County - it is arguably the single most important master plan in decades -- I am attending all of their sessions, as well as informal sessions regarding various options to finance the infrastructure improvements that are necessary. In addition, I hosted a productive session of community members, MCPS, Park & Planning staff, and developers to discuss finding an appropriate school site or sites within the sector plan. The bottom line is that I am working hard to make sure that I understand all of the issues and am in a strong position to advocate on behalf of our community when the plan comes before the full Council.

In the meantime, I can share with you some principles that will guide my review and action on this plan when it does come to the full Council, some of which I spelled out in a speech that you can watch [here](#). First, I believe that we must have a commitment to protect the quality of life for surrounding neighborhoods. That means, at a minimum, that we must protect against "cut-through" traffic; provide access to wonderful new amenities such as recreation centers, library facilities, and more green spaces; and do everything we can to maximize transit options and reduce vehicle miles traveled on Rockville Pike, including creating a smaller network of "grid-like" streets that will take cars off the Pike.

If we do those things, plus transform Rockville Pike into a grand boulevard, make this entire area pedestrian and

bike friendly, and create a vibrant, alive sense of place, the new White Flint should not only be attractive to those who choose to live and work there in the future, but for the residents who have lived in surrounding suburban communities for decades. This certainly turned out to be true in Bethesda, where the surrounding residential neighborhoods like Edgemoor have been among the principal beneficiaries of the new Bethesda, not only in terms of their property values, but in terms of their immediate access to such a lovely part of our County.

And finally, White Flint should be state of the art when it comes to "sustainability." We should be able to reduce our carbon footprint, increase our stormwater protections, and substantially increase our tree canopy (how many trees do you see along the Pike today?). The new White Flint must be an environmental/energy plus.

There have been many improvements to the Plan in the last few months, many of which I have advocated for on your behalf: the civic green should be almost 2 acres; there will be a full-service library; a new recreation center will adjoin the aquatic center; and there will be more green spaces for our residents to enjoy.

Our work isn't done of course. We have major issues to address with respect to how the improvements, expected to take place over 30 years, will be "staged;" and we must figure how we can ensure that the public and private dollars necessary to pay for the critical infrastructure necessary to make this all happen are there when we need them.

While there are many people that are extremely excited by the prospects of this plan, there are also those who are concerned about its potential impact on congestion and on their surrounding community. Please know that I am working hard to address those concerns. I am meeting constantly with community advocates to make sure that I understand all of these concerns, and wherever possible, come up with positive solutions. That's my job, and that's what I pledge I'll keep doing in the weeks ahead as this plan comes before the full Council.

Consumers and Pepco Rate Increases

Many of you may be familiar with legislation that I sponsored and saw enacted in 2007 that added energy and environmental advocacy to the functions of the Montgomery County Office of Consumer Protection (OCP). This measure requires the OCP to represent the County's interest in obtaining the lowest possible rates consistent with environmental stewardship for gas, electricity and other energy sources by participating in matters pending before appropriate federal and state agencies. We are seeing the benefits of that law in proceedings now before the Maryland Public Services Commission.

OCP is currently intervening before the Maryland Public Service Commission regarding a new PEPCO case in which the electric utility is seeking a significant increase in its rates, including those paid by Montgomery County regarding its street lights. OCP is collaborating with other agencies, and these efforts could potentially save Montgomery County, and its residents, many thousands of dollars.

District 1 Forum in Friendship Heights

On January 25, I held my eighth District 1 Forum, this one in Friendship Heights. I was pleased that we had a large turnout from the community and that residents were able to take time out of their evening to share with me their concerns. Listening to and responding to my constituents is one of the most important aspects of holding this office, and it is a responsibility I take very seriously. Many thanks to the Friendship Heights Village Center for the use of their beautiful space.



I was also joined by Cub Scout Pack 817 from Burning Tree Elementary School. Congratulations to them on earning their Citizenship Badges!

Women's Legislative Briefing

On January 31, I attended the 30th Annual Women's Legislative Briefing in Rockville. It was an afternoon of important dialogue on topics such as caring for women's health and working for economic security. Afterwards, I had the pleasure of speaking with Lilly Ledbetter, who in 2007 won her lawsuit against Goodyear Tires following the Supreme Court's decision in *Ledbetter v. Goodyear Tire & Rubber Co.*, and is the namesake of the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act of 2009 which President Obama signed last year. We are pictured here with Judith Vaughan-Prather, Executive Director of the Montgomery County Commission for Women.



Best of Bethesda Award

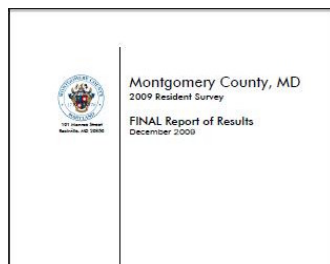


I am honored and humbled to have been voted "Best County Councilmember" by the readers of Bethesda Magazine. It is truly a privilege to represent all of the residents of District 1. Thank you to all of you who voted.

Municipal News

Do you have news from your municipality? Would you like it to be included in a future issue of the Berliner Brief? Give our office a call at (240) 777-7828 or send us an [email](#) with the information and we'll make sure it is included.

Resident Survey Results: Montgomery County is a Good Place to Live



Recently, the results of the 2009 Montgomery County Resident Survey were released. Three thousand randomly selected households were mailed the survey, which gave residents the opportunity to rate the County on a variety of topics, such as quality of life, services provided, and satisfaction with local government.

I am pleased that eight in ten residents gave positive marks to Montgomery County on quality of life issues like educational, volunteer, and recreational opportunities. Similarly, eight in ten respondents gave positive marks to our County government on

services such as fire, ambulance, and emergency services; garbage collection; recycling; public library services; and parks programs.

While there have been some public conversations recently with respect to the virtues of Montgomery County versus Fairfax County, I for one believe that the quality of life we have here in Montgomery County surpasses that of any neighboring jurisdiction, and I would not choose to live anywhere else.

You can see the entire report [here](#).

Upcoming Council Dates

The Council will be holding three Public Hearings next week on the upcoming Capital Improvement Projects (CIP) Budget. The hearings will be February 9, 10, and 11 at 7pm in the Council Office Building. If you would like to testify at one of the hearings, please call (240) 777-7803 and speak with Jackie Hawksford.

The 2010 Census

As Montgomery County seeks to achieve the most accurate count possible for the 2010 Census, over 1,000 temporary jobs will be created to locate households and conduct interviews with residents. These critical positions will provide a much needed short-term economic boost and help lower record unemployment rates. Bilingual individuals and those with valuable cultural knowledge will be vital to the effort and are encouraged to apply.

My Office

As always, my staff and I look forward to hearing from you and to seeing you at community events. **Cindy Gibson** is my Chief of Staff and handles land use, including the White Flint Sector Plan; **Susan Buffone** focuses on transportation and environmental issues; **Lou D'Ovidio** follows Public Safety and Management and Fiscal Policy Committee issues; **Julie Genn** focuses on Health and Human Services and Education Committee issues; **Chad Bolt** handles constituent service issues that we receive and manages my website; and **Beth Sylvester** manages my busy calendar and is the friendly voice on the other end of the phone when you call our office. All of them will try to facilitate your interaction with County government in any way that they can.

Thank you for your trust, and please let me know what I can do for you. It is truly a privilege to do this work, and I thank you for the opportunity.

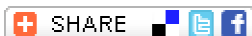
Roger Berliner
Councilmember
District 1



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